# Aleister "BLACK MAGIC" Crowley

By FRANCIS DICKIE

Crowley as High Priest of O.T. O. (Order of the Temple of the Orient).

DURING 40 years as a writer dwelling in five countries, I have had many unusual experiences. The most bizarre was a proposition made to me in Paris in 1929 to be press agent for Aleister Crowley's pretended suicide, a trick to boost the price of his 35 occult books.

"But who is Aleister Crowley?" This will be the first exclamation question by many Americans. Well, if almost unheard of in America, Crowley was the most infamous English literary figure of the 20th century. Yet, none the less a great literary figure.

Thus, that Americans may fully understand my experience, it seems best to first here briefly relate the astounding life story of this man. His own religiously fanatical mother called him to his face *The Beast.* Her cruelty to him as a child perhaps accounts for his own later horrible life. In addition to the cruelties of his parents, a guardian uncle, and a brutal schoolmaster, he became a "Satanist." He prayed to the devil to protect him from the combined inhumanities of them. Thus, in his childhood, were sown the seeds of sadism practiced by him in later life in the secret societies he formed in Europe and North America.

He also was one of the strangest figures in English letters. Among writers he was in a class by himself. Poet, he was almost a genius for the haunting word. Even that staid English magazine, the *Atheneum,* now long gone, listed him among the great ones of this century. Novelist of dread trend, he wrote books of Magic which English magistrates ordered burned, and American police destroyed. He wrote an autobiography of a million words ranking among the strangest. Mountain climber of note he thrice assailed Kangchenjunga. He led strange religious cults that brought him banishment from the United States, Italy and France. He was a world wanderer and a man of mystery. All these things was Aleister Crowley.

Though his enormously wealthy parents treated him him terribly, when they died, Crowley was left £50,000. Crowley was only 23 when he inherited this large fortune, and in the next ten years inherited 10,000 more from an aunt. At this early age he took up the study of black magic. Astounding as it may sound, black magic has a large number of followers in this 20th century. Crowley's success was largely due, I am convinced, because of his thorough belief in himself and his powers.

Next to an absorbing ambition to write great poetry and be a master of Magic, Crowley desired to climb the highest peak in the Himalayas. Between the years 1900 and 1906 he was a part of three expeditions he paid for. In two of these the party reached the height of 25,000 feet. The two most successful took so terrible a toll of life from hardship, and one man's insanity, that Crowley turned to other things.

Edward Aleister Crowley, who assumed the title "Sir," early in life, was born at Leamington, England, in October 1875. Given great wealth at 23 he

Crowley at 40. His street costume was maintained for many years: a black Homburg and a long flowing cape.

spent lavishly on his obsessions: mountain climbing and Black Magic. At 25 he went to Mexico and founded the order of "The Lamp of Invisible Light." In the next five years he dwelt for various periods in Honolulu, Japan and India. In India he studied Buddhism. He dressed as a beggar near the door of Madura Temple. He became an expert in Yogi, a form of religion which, sponsored by many priests, has secured quite a following in the United States and Canada.

From his various wanderings, Crowley always returned to Europe. He founded a branch of his "Order of the Invisible Light" in London in 1903.

Shortly after his cult was founded in London, it became whispered about that strange orgiastic rites were practiced. At this time Crowley's book *The Key to The Great Mystery* was burned in London and U.S.A. He continued to produce books of poetry, novels, and esoteric writings over a period of years, 35 in all. In 1905 he arrived in Paris and was accepted in French artistic circles. Among those he came to know intimately was Rodin, at the moment the center of an attack for his statue of Balzac.

In 1914, after the outbreak of the war, Crowley was in New York. He soon attracted attention for his apparent German sympathies. The publication of violent articles against the Allies in certain periodicals made him highly unpopular. Yet this apparent pro-Germanism was only a cloak to hide his true identity as a counter spy working in the interest of England. He succeeded in gaining the confidence of German workers and thus proved highly valuable.

In 1918 Crowley arrived in the booming city of Detroit and founded a new religious order called the "Order of the Temple of the Orient." Some of the city's most prominent citizens became members. The motto of the cult was the famous saying of Crowley's: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law," a saying which, in all truth, Crowley lived up to during his life.

In the bustling city of Detroit, full of new wealth, Crowley found many sensation seekers. Men and women of the highest social strata joined his temple. His "bible" a large blue-bound volume stamped in gold with mystic numbers was put on sale in bookstores. Soon the federal authorities stopped the sale on the grounds it was immoral. Crowley disappeared. Several men in high places went bankrupt. Many divorces took place among prominent people who had been initiated into the cult.

Crowley went to Italy and formed another colony. The suicide of one of its members attracted the attention of the police. Crowley was escorted to France, home of all exiles. In Paris, on the Avenue de Suffren, he took up a house and lived in royal style. In the summer of 1929 the French police deported him because of orgiastic rites held there.

Briefly, this is the biography of Aleister Crowley—Master of Black Magic. He is one of the strangest abnormalities among modern writers, and mystics of the wrong kind. He steeped himself in magic lore, particularly the Orphic mysteries: that is orgiastic. As a writer he is unique in his dealing with the early expressions of Phallicism. He was one of the latest of the Cabalists. It is their belief that: by finding the "mystic word" for anything, it gave them absolute mastery of that object. This is a mixture of demonology, astrology, chiromancy and medicine. Apparently Crowley actually believed in his power. At least, while his fortune lasted, he spent enormous sums in experimenting. He even bought a castle in a remote section of Scotland in which to experiment. When his fortune was spent he became a ruthless charlatan.

"Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law." In his last years, many thousands of gullible people listened and were rocked by this and other fine-sounding phrases from the lips of Aleister Crowley.

And this is the man, who on a March afternoon in Paris in 1929, approached me with his fantastic proposition I be his press agent for his faked suicide in order to sell at high prices his 35 books.

At that moment I did not know all of his life story previously recounted. I did know a little: that he was notorious for orgiastic rites, and as a practitioner of Black Magic. I had also read Somerset Maugham's novel *The Magician,* first published 1908. In this Crowley was the actual person presented under the name of Oliver Haddon, Master of Black Magic. And in Arnold Bennet's book *Paris Nights,* a chapter was devoted to Crowley. Earlier in the week, I had been introduced to Crowley by a man named Stratford. He said he had been a classmate at Cambridge with

Crowley performs magic by signs of the Cabal.

Crowley. Stratford was a dubious character, every one in the little cafe-world around Montparnasse knew, and wondered how he made a living. I doubt he had ever been to Cambridge. At this introductory meeting at the Cafe du Dôme, Crowley talked only briefly, making no mention of his intention. I did, however, notice wonderingly how intently he studied me. There was something hypnotic in his eyes, his pupils at moments suddenly seemed to enlarge.

This March late afternoon he came up to me with startling suddenness in front of the Cafe du Dôme. He said, almost commandingly: "Let's cross over to the Select." This was a cafe diagonally across the Boulevard Montparnasse.

We started across the spacious Boulevard. Taxis and private motor cars rushed either way with the speedless limit only Paris permits. Suddenly Crowley stepped in front of me, two quick steps, right in the path of a big touring car. French drivers are amazingly dexterous. In the nick of time the chauffeur swerved the car. The flange of the wheels grazed the curb, the car rocked a moment, steadied. A string of curses from the driver floated back momentarily upon our ears. Crowley heaved a vast sigh.

"You see, they won't hit me. I've tried it twenty times this last week, and they always miss me." There was dreadful resignation in his voice. "I wish I were dead," he went on, "and perhaps my books would be in demand, and men would call me great."

As he finished speaking we set foot upon the sidewalk. It was my turn to sigh with relief. We entered the Select. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The place was almost deserted. In a corner Crowley heaved his huge bulk along the length of the *banquette*. He wore a brick red coat, plus-four to match, a golfing cap that shrieked its yellow brightness to heaven. When he took it off, he revealed a closely-cropped head of black hair with a bald streak running across like a furrow. His heavy round face was that of an English squire, with an addition of cunning.

In this minute, as I have already said, I knew only part of the man's history. Only a few minutes later, when he made me the most amazing proposition I had ever received in my fairly eventful life of twenty years as a newspaperman, did I realize that nearly allowing himself to be run down was but part of his artistic showmanry to grip my attention. Undoubtedly it was the excellence of his technique, combined with a degree of bravery that had given him his former success as a leader of strange cults, and his reputation as a worker of Black Magic.

Now Crowley, to my astonishment, told me he had seen me often in the quarter and had been making inquiries about me. Evidently these had been gathered from people who overpraised my newspaper abilities.

"You see," he explained," I am rather well-known in England and America. A number of my 35 books have been published. I have at present a thousand copies stored away in London. My books are fairly scarce at good prices in the catalogues of the rare booksellers. But a man's books always increase in value after he is dead. Now if it could be made to appear that I committed suicide under mysterious circumstances, my books would leap in value. That is what I propose to do. I want an experienced newspaperman to write up the disappearance and spread it to all the papers possible. Then, with this interest aroused, I will have the thousand copies of my book offered to various old book dealers. I will give you ten percent of the profit," he added graciously.

I repressed my astonishment with difficulty. To make so blatantly dishonest a proposition to a perfect stranger was astounding. However, I was very diplomatic because my interest was aroused. While I had no intention of becoming press agent to a man intent in doing the old book dealers, I saw in the man a very interesting story. I put off for some days my refusal during those days of talk.

I asked with a great show of interest, which was in no way feigned, something about the books and his life in general. At these meetings he told me a number of remarkable stories about himself.

Queerly enough, shortly before I had met a young, rich, dilettante from Detroit, interested in the occult. He had seen me with Crowley and told me something of the man's adventures in Detroit. From the facts thus gathered, and from the man who claimed he had been a schoolmate of Crowley's, I have given already a brief outline of his amazing career. And in the telling of it now in 1961, from old notes, are portions of conversations with Crowley.

On that first evening in the Cafe Select, and in a number of following conversations, Crowley said many interesting things.

"My life has been a delirious dance to maddening music with incarnate passion for my partner. I have attained all my ambitions, proved myself at every point, dared every danger, enjoyed ecstasy that earth has to offer. From this I look upon life with enlightened eyes. I sought and found, and then I set out to seek those who seek, that they also might find."

Perhaps this was showmanry; yet he spoke with an appearance of sincerety.

Telling me of his close friendship with the famous French sculptor, Rodin, he was brilliant.

"Rodin was more of a god than a man. Yet he had no intellect in the pure sense of the word; he was just

Crowley in costume of High Priest of the O. T. O.

an amazing virility constantly overflowing into the creation of vibrating visions. Rodin told me how he had started out to do his Balzac. He had armed himself with all the documents. Then, after pouring over them, he was seized with despair. In a rage he abandoned all this pedantic programme, and set to work on his own conception. He invited me to stay with him at Meudon, and write a poetical interpretation of his various works. I went and wrote a book *Rodin in Rime*. This was illustrated with seven sketches which Rodin made for the book."

From my various conversations and observation of Crowley, I still think he believed in his power with magic. It seems doubtful to me if a leader of any cult of whatsoever nature has been successful without believing in themselves and the tenets they proclaimed. Thus, when I listened to Aleister Crowley, ex-high priest of the "Lamp of the Invisible Circle," and later, "Order of the Temple of the Orient," tell of happenings in connection with his magic, so convincing were his descriptions that for the time being, at least, one felt them true.

In 1905 Crowley and his wife had returned to their Manor of Boleskins, in Scotland. A war had broken out among a secret order of magicians, and the greatest of these "Made Magic" against Crowley in Scotland. This incident Crowley related to me with great dramatic intensity.

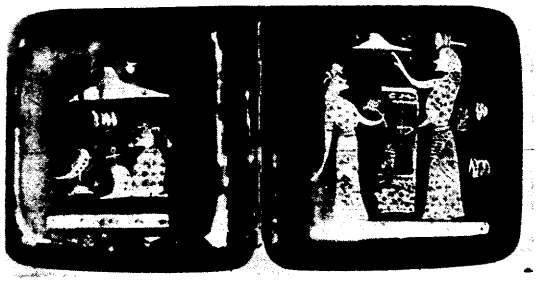
"I had a pack of bloodhounds," Crowley said, "but he killed them all. The servants were made ill. The house had a plague of beetles sent upon it. These were about half an inch long, with a single horn nearly as long. I sent a specimen to London, but the experts declared it to be a hitherto unknown species. I at once set about counter magic work, employing the talismans from the 'Sacred Book of Magic,' evoking Beelzebub and his 49 servitors, including Nimorup, a stunted dwarf, and Nominon, a large red spongy jellyfish, and Holastri, an enormous pink bug. In this way the attacks were overcome, and ceased from that time."

This sounded quite absurd coming from the lips of a fat, heavy shouldered middle-aged man in plus-fours. Yet thousands had been impressed by him; and lost money and reputations had marked the wake of Crowley's activities.

During those few days while I carried on conversations with Crowley, before giving him my already instantly made decision to say "No" to his nefarious proposition, he one afternoon called at my studio and took me to see a moving picture based on the book by Somerset Maugham, *The Magician,* of which Crowley was the hero. The book has some actually frightening descriptions, powerfully done, and the picture was fairly compelling.

As part of his "Magic," Crowley claimed the power of making himself invisible, and I met some people who said that he could, people rather sensible and hard headed.

"The secret of invisibility," Crowley said, "is not concerned with the law of optics. It is to acquire a certain mental state—a peculiar variety of mental self-absorption. This distracts people's attention from one automatically. Thus, once in Mexico City, I was able to take a walk in the street in a golden crown and a scarlet robe, yet no one saw me. Once in Calcutta at night in the Street of Infamy called 'Culinga Bazar' I was set upon by several men. I shot one of them, and was able by my power of invisibility to walk through the crowds which were quickly attracted to the spot."



The covers of Crowley's cigarette case with emblems of Osiris which he left holding down a fake death note near the Boca da Inferno.

This was part of my last friendly talk with Crowley. When I told him I couldn't accept his proposition, he snapped: "Why the hell didn't you say so at once!"

Late winter of 1930, nearly a year after Crowley's amazing proposal to me, the Portuguese papers in Lisbon announced the finding of a note at the mouth of Bocade Inferno, a dangerous piece of water celebrated as a place for suicides. It was signed TU LI Yu which, later, was found to be Crowley's "mystic name." The note purported to be a farewell to a lady, in which he declared he was committing suicide for love.

From this newspaper story, which was reprinted in the then sensational Paris magazine *Match,* I realized some less scrupulous newspaperman had taken on the publicity job for Crowley.

I did not know until some time later of Crowley's whereabouts.

Then came a letter from a friend in London. He had been acquainted with many of the great figures in English literary circles. He had known Crowley for years and, on a visit to me in Paris, we had discussed the newspaper story of his death. Here is an excerpt from it: "Well, who do you think I saw the other night at the Cafe Royal? that fat slug Crowley, looking as well as ever."

Whether Crowley unloaded his thousand surplus books on the old book dealers, I don't know. I don't know how he made a living from 1930 until his death in a small house at Hastings, England, December 1st, 1947, aged 72 years.

The London Press' obituaries were unforgiving even in Crowley's death. Repeated were ancient newspaper stories of Black Masses, human sacrifices, orgiastic parties, and other things of which the man had been accused in life.

Perhaps the *Daily Express* heading:

WICKEDEST MAN IN BRITAIN DIES

best expresses the accumulated opinion of that great city's newspapermen.

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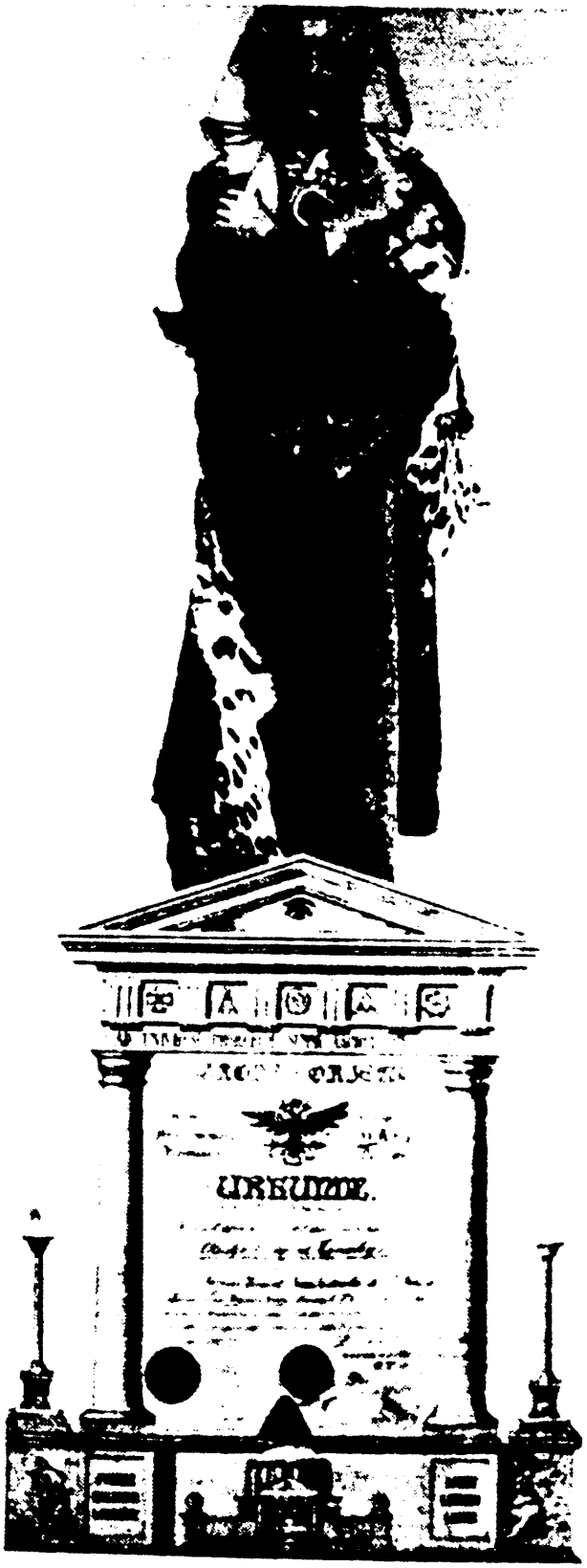
Crowley in costume of High Priest of the O. T. O.

Crowley at 40. His street costume was maintained for many years: a black Homburg and a long flowing cape.

Crowley performs magic by signs of the Cabal.



Crowley as High Priest of O.T.O. (Order of the Temple of the Orient).

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